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## THE PRESS OF MEXICO

The story of the press of Mexico is a narrative of dissolutions. Disturbed conditions—economic, political and social—are reflected in every character of publication, including pamphlets and books. Nearly all are controversial or didactic—written with a purpose; and reinforce fairly in point of time and circumstance the briefer attitudes of the press. A few poets and novelists have risen above the dust of things, but scarcely a historian or publicist can be said to have freed himself from his broken environment.

There have existed in Mexico no journals of importance, save in the capital of the country. The papers of the metropolis have supplied the general current of news, although in meager measure, for, without exception, local news has always been of primary concern. This is not difficult to understand when it is recalled that Mexico is a primitive country, and that its reading public numbers perhaps not more than 1,000,000 souls, or approximately seven per cent of the population. With the exception of the *Occidental* of Guadalajara there is today scarcely a paper outside of the City of Mexico worthy of mention. Saltillo, Monterrey, Chihuahua, Torreon, Vera Cruz, Tampico, to be sure, have had their newspapers—and have today—but the above characterization still holds true in general.

Prior to the Diaz régime there existed no press in Mexico in the true sense of the word. There was no news-gathering agency in the country, and the foreign associations still held aloof. As a matter of fact, the conditions prerequisite to the successful exploitation of newspapers were lacking. Most of the so-called journals have been little more than bulletins, and appeared and disappeared with the political irregularities of the times. But the rule which Diaz imposed was well adapted to the habits of the Mexicans, and one phase of the development inaugurated under him was reflected in a fairly organized press, which assumed a dignity and voice not hitherto known. The first daily of importance, published at a low price, was the *Noticioso* (1890) of Angel Pola. It leaned more or less to the publication of sensational matter, but even so, it expired in 1896. Contemporaneously there were issued in Mexico *El Siglo XIX*, *El Partido Liberal*, *El Monitor Republicano*, *El Nacional*. The latter—not to be confused with *El Nacional* of today—is worthy of notice. It was directed by Gregorio Aldasoro, of marked liberal tendencies. The editors engaged by him were able and their editorials were widely read, though chiefly by the higher classes; but decay came in due season, and then dissolution.

*El Universal*, an afternoon paper, was founded in the nineties by one of the most distinguished of Mexican editors, Rafael Reyes Spíndola, now an expatriate. *El Universal* came to be the most widely read paper in the republic, and was followed by all classes of society. At the height of its influence it was bought by Ramón Prida, who associated with him in its management Luis del Toro and Eusebio Sánchez. But the masterly touch of Spíndola was lacking, and in 1902 *El Universal* vanished.

Spíndola, when he had parted company with *El Universal* did not leave the journalistic stage, and in 1896, *El Imparcial*—a daily dedicated to general news—was founded. It was sold at two centavos, a price made possible through a subsidy endowment from the government. The reduced price, as well as the merit of the paper, contributed to its rapid growth. It became the semi-official organ of the Diaz, or *Científico*, party, and prospered accordingly. Spíndola also established and published from the same office an afternoon paper called *El Mundo*, the title of which was early changed to *El Herald*. Here he maintained the standards and principles of *El Imparcial*.

In this earlier period, a paper of influence was *El Tiempo*, which represented the clerical interests and harked back to a time when the Church had been a potent factor in formulating the fortunes of the State. It was popularly supposed to be subsidized by the Clerical party; and was, in a sense, an opposition organ, although its criticism of the government was more or less innocuous, for it feared the doubled fist of Diaz. *El Tiempo*, however, slowly lost caste, and in 1904 was supplanted with the Church faction by *El País*, although the latter was ever regarded as addressing itself too much to the lower classes. It was, indeed, in spite of its radical tendencies, much more of a newspaper than *El Tiempo*; but both suffered decline in the faithless atmosphere of the day, and came to be but names.

It cannot be said that there existed an opposition press in the time of Diaz, for, as rabid periodicals emerged, they were suppressed. The ruler of Mexico extirpated without unction all hostile publications. Such a fate befell the *Voz de Jaurez* of Paulino Martínez, revolutionist of red tendencies. And, too, *La Tarántula*, envenomed, reached a bitter end. *Tilín-Tilín* sounded its small alarm and was throttled. The paper by this name of today carries but a faint echo of the tocsin sounded by the first. *El Diario del Hogar*, of Ficomena Mata, was mildly in opposition, but Diaz, out of old friendship, permitted it to criticise until it expired from natural causes. Perhaps the best known

opposition paper was *El Demócrata*, owned by José Ferrél, later a candidate for governor of Sinaloa. Diaz tolerated its criticisms for a time, but Ferrél's path was not long one of roses; soon the jail, *incomunicado*, cut off his activities. The same end befell the group which issued for a season *La República*—a group later to be distinguished in the political upheavals of the country. Madero was a member of it.

After the turn of the century, the gilded empire of Diaz came more and more to excite the cupidity and envy of ambitious politicians and schemers. Almost without exception they professed to embrace the political tenets of the president, for it was indeed only through such camouflaged method that one might vent his opposition. There were, however, a few who quietly posed as standing out against the invincible Diaz. Aspirants to the political succession became more and more active, and each endeavored to establish an "organ"; but it can be said positively that scarcely a man in Mexico expected to see any change in the ruling dispensations, so long as the great Dictator lived. So, schemers and politicians alike builded against the day when Death should conquer the mighty soul that had brought peace and prosperity to a land which had known but chaos since the expulsion of the Spaniards.

Of the aspiring ones, Creel of Chihuahua—prominent banker and sometime Minister of Foreign Relations and Ambassador to the United States—developed a journal that should speak for him, *El Diario*. It was edited by Ernesto Simondetti, a man of intelligence; and Creel was much exploited. His chief competitor was Ramón Corral, who purposely had been made vice-president on account of his insignificance. His mouthpiece was *El Debate*, and it came to be soundly hated because of its vitriolic attacks on men and measures. The president, however, gave the matter of political rivalries no special concern, because, at the moment, he considered the contentions of his friends more or less trivial. He did, indeed, overlook the significance of his relation to Corral, who, in the public eye, loomed large because of the fact that he appeared to be silhouetted in the shadow of the giant; and that public realized, as Diaz himself did not, that the giant towering mightily on the horizon would soon wend his way into the dark. In a word, Diaz was old, and the crafty man of that earlier time now shrank into the converging corridors at life's end; but grandly, as a king would he go to that end.

For several years he planned what proved to be the crowning event of his political career—the Centennial of 1910, in celebration of the outbreak of the revolution against Spain, which eventuated in Mexican

independence. He enlisted the press in a country-wide campaign, and right royally it responded. The newspapers that really counted at this time were: *El Pais*, *El Diario*, *El Imparcial*, and the *Mexican Herald*. The latter was published in English and had for several years been regarded as the mouthpiece, not only of the American colony, but also of the progressive elements in Mexico. It enjoyed a wide circulation and carried much more news and advertising matter than any of the Mexican journals. It received daily about ten thousand words from the Associated Press, which only the *Imparcial* shared. It carried telegraphic news on its front page and filled its inside columns with accounts of commercial and mining enterprises, railroad and irrigation projects, with histories of the doings of functionaries, and interviews with prominent personages. A deal of space was given to sports, but none to the police courts. In a word, *The Herald* was a modern journal. It had been preceded in Mexico by the *Two Republics*, a daily published in the nineties. This sheet had really paved the way for the *Herald*. Also, account must be taken of the *Daily Record*, an afternoon paper financed by Ham, of the defunct United States Banking Company. It was published for a few years, expiring in 1910, with the crash of the above-named institution.

In marked contrast, the Mexican dailies devoted their front pages to local affairs, which was indicative of the fact that the mass of the people cared little about foreign news, particularly since it dealt mostly with American matters. Large cuts ornamented these front pages, depicting social and political events of importance. Further, the rule then prevailed of placing editorials on the *front* page. The inside space was filled with the barest possible accounts of foreign affairs, prominence being given to news from Spain.

Such, then, was the state of the press when President Diaz threw open the gates upon the brilliant Centennial, little suspecting that the tiny cloud on the horizon to the north was to develop into a storm which should sweep him from his high position. Madero, half idealist and half madman, with a handful of adherents crossed the Rio Grande while still applause rolled through the streets of the capital, and almost before the echoes of that applause had expired, Porfirio Diaz—general, statesman, and builder of Mexico—was weighing anchor in Vera Cruz, not again to see his native land.

Under the wings of the Madero revolution—with his promise of “liberty of the press”—a new era dawned. While most of the old newspapers continued in existence for the time being, mildly in oppo-

sition, their eyes were cast backward; the future augured ill. Like noxious mushrooms rabid sheets sprang up, and soon were scattering their seed far and near. First may be mentioned the *Nueva Era*, Madero's organ, which uttered parrot phrases and empty nothings on the great revolution which had been achieved. With inarticulate irony the walls of the fire-gutted building, whence the *Nueva Era* was issued, stand today full of gunshot wounds.

Following the *Nueva Era*, in due course came *El Antere-Eleccionista*, which adopted for its title Madero's slogan of "no re-election"; and *El Sol*, *La Tribuna*, and *México Nuevo*. Forthwith editors and pamphleteers, none too well prepared for their profession, began attacking this or that iniquity promiscuously.

On October 12, 1911, were established *La Prensa* and the *Daily Mexican*. The former was frankly an opposition organ, and it was current rumor that when these papers got hard up for cash the editors would write particularly savage paragraphs and send them in advance to the Madero government, which promptly paid the price and suppressed them. However, both journals were short-lived. *El Mañana* was another radical sheet, basking in the sun of liberty of the press. It attacked Madero viciously, and even did not permit his ministers to escape; and it may be said that his loss of prestige was due in no small measure to these uncurbed diatribes. Also the *Multicolor*, an illustrated weekly, vented bitter satire on the president who had promised, it said, every man an hacienda and ended by giving him a stone. The caricatures were cleverly conceived and did their share in bringing about the end of the *Maderistas*.

Pino-Suárez, vice-president under Madero, imitating the fashion set by Mexican politicians, soon had *El Intransigente* in full panoply. No paper was ever founded in the republic with more prophetic title; and, it may be added, none more richly deserved a hurried flight. Then came *El Independiente*, established by the wealthy Braniff family, who saw in one of its members a possible future candidate for the presidency.

But Mexican politics go by no fixed rules, and the friends of the *Maderistas*—the mild mannered revolutionists who had shaken out the *Científicos*—were ruthlessly smashed, in February, 1913, through the revolt of Félix Díaz and Victoriano Huerta. The ten tragic days of the *Cuartelazo* ended the régime which had come to represent but a modified form of *Cientificismo*. Truly, the Madero rule had brought but a change in political guardians, for, once in power, the newcomers found that the only hope of survival lay in taking over, as far as possible, the machinery and the principles of the great Díaz.

Huerta was still more reactionary. He arrived on the scene in characteristic Mexican style, a style which has varied little since it was inaugurated by Iturbide and perfected by Santa Anna. Huerta found *El Imparcial*, *El Independiente*, *El Diario*, *La Nación*, *El País*, the *Mexican Herald*, the *Courier du Mexique*, and *El Correo Español* ready to serve his ends. While they had not been mild in their criticisms of Madero, they were scornfully bitter in their attacks on Venustiano Carranza, from Cuatro Ciénegas. But whatever the merits or demerits of the Huerta coup d'état, the attitude of the government of the United States marked it for destruction.

When Carranza's forces first reached Mexico City in the fall of 1914, they immediately took over the plant of *El Imparcial* and issued from it a paper called *El Mexicano*. They seized *El País* and published from its presses *La Opinión*, and also appropriated the plant of *El Diario* and began to issue a sheet called *El Demócrata*, under the direction of Rafael Martínez—not to be confused with the earlier journal of that name.

When a few months later Villa and Zapata drove Carranza to Vera Cruz, they took over the abovenamed journals and issued for themselves *El Liberal*, *El Monitor*, *El Radical*, and *El Norte*. This leaves out of count several twice-a-week papers; but at once, on Carranza's return to the capital, the former papers were reestablished, and in addition *El Pueblo* was called into existence. Also, there was founded by Dr. Atl, *El Acción Mundial*, with principles avowedly socialistic. So rabid, indeed, were its paragraphs that soon Carranza could no longer support them, and expelled Atl from the country. Carranza, the boasted friend of the press, and sponsor for its liberty, now began his career of smashing opposition, and he even surpassed in some respects the so-called tyrannical régime of the *Científicos*. The *Mexican Herald*, the best known journal in the republic, having been issued from Vera Cruz during the American intervention, was forbidden to resume publication in the capital or any other city of the republic. So today the only paper in the country published in English is a weekly at Tampico.

In 1916, Felix Palavicini, former minister of Public Instruction in the Carranza Cabinet, established *El Universal* with pro-ally tendencies. On account of the fearlessness, candor, and intellectual texture of the Palavicini editorials, his paper at once gained a wide influence; but because of its strictures on the government it fell under the displeasure of the administration. Accordingly, his paper was closed in

April, 1917. Later, an adjustment was made and it resumed publication, but in May, 1918, matters again came to a climax, and Palavicini was informed that he would be killed if he did not leave the country. After two or three warnings, he sold his interest in the paper, and to a member of Carranza's cabinet, according to rumor. At all events he left Mexico. The paper—emasculated, and under German influence—continued to function under the direction of José Ugarte; but since the war's end it has changed its tone.

Scarcely was Palavicini over the border when the editor of *El Redención*, an opposition organ, was notified similarly that his life was in danger; but he persisted in his ways, and at the end of May, 1918, a desperate attempt was made to destroy him. The authors of these atrocious acts are not easily located, but the fact remains that the boasted "liberty of the press" in Mexico under Carranza became something less than the text implies.

At the moment there are being published in the capital four papers of some significance: *El Universal*, *El Excelsior*, *El Pueblo*, and *El Demócrata*. Of these, the first has been characterized; the second is the cleanest and the only strictly pro-ally paper in Mexico. *El Pueblo*, ostensibly neutral, is in effect anti-American; the last, until the Germans had been beaten, was venomously germanophile and while the war was in progress, had much to say against the United States.

Keeping company with the anti-ally *El Demócrata*, were the mid-day papers, *El Boletín de la Guerra* and *La Defensa*, each of which was friendly to Germany. The afternoon paper, *El Nacionalista*, was also pro-German. But, as though this were not enough, twice a week the Germans published the *Deutsche Zeitung von Mexico* and *Informaciones Inalambricas*. These sheets held up to ridicule the Americans and their puny efforts in the war; the allies, they represented, were but laughingstocks, while the Germans were conquering the world.

The press of Mexico, as a whole then, has been and is dependent on the favor of the ruling powers. But more important still has been the matter of finances. All have had to struggle to make ends meet; and nearly all have failed. The clientele has been limited; and business has hertofore not been so organized as to make use of the press to any great extent for advertising purposes. What with a narrow reading public and lack of demand for advertising space, the situation is difficult enough. Probably the reading audience of the whole of Mexico is smaller than that of Boston, and more papers are published in New York City in a day than in the entire republic in a year.



While the war was in progress the question of print paper came to be of vital concern in Mexico. None could be brought from Europe; the supply was dependent on the United States. We limited the export, and there nearly arose a crisis on this account. We would have been justified in cutting off all supplies, for the black-listed Germanophile *Demócrata* was able—through using the semi-official organ, *El Pueblo*, as a screen—to supply itself with paper. This was made possible through the intervention of the Mexican Government.

It is not easy to forecast the future of the press in Mexico. However, so long as financial uncertainties and internal disorders continue, there can be no substantial progress. The United States is vitally interested in a prosperous, happy Mexico, with whom it would live in peace. Unfortunately, the Mexican press has served to accentuate at times the expression of unfriendly feeling against the United States and this quite naturally found some echo in this country. What the new régime will bring forth can as yet be only conjecture. A sober thinking and earnest Mexican press that refuses to be swept from its moorings can accomplish much for both Mexico and the United States.

WALTER F. McCaleb.

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## NOTES

### LIST OF ECONOMIC ITEMS REFERRING TO HISPANIC AMERICA

Items published in *Commerce Reports*, March 1–June 30, 1920, are as follows:

- Additional ships for Patagonian trade. No. 139, June 14.
- Advertising American goods by motion pictures in Nicaragua. No. 108, May 7.
- Aerial transport service for the West Indies. No. 75, March 30.
- Agricultural products exported from British Guiana. No. 97, April 24.
- American advertising in Argentina. No. 99, April 27.
- American Commercial Attaché Appointed for Chile. No. 74, March 29.
- American construction materials needed by Brazil. No. 118, May 18.
- American Loan to Bolivia. No. 109, May 8.
- Americans purchase Mexican sugar plantations. No. 67, March 20.
- Argentina as an automobile market. No. 88, April 14.
- Argentine crop prospects. No. 59, March 11.
- Argentina's building program. No. 83, April 8.